

THE ROUGH-WINGS OF THE HERCULES.

The Hercules with her guns and war-paint taken off, was our station tug at Port Royal. A powerful old sea-going tug thoroughly refitted and just what we needed. I was on the Nantucket then and came astern one morning in the light skiff with the regular report. Forward on the Hercules was old Johnny Greek, who ordered me to moor my boat further aft so as not to disturb his birds. He didn't seem to be as crusty as usual, so I asked to see his birds, supposing he was trying to raise some young Mockingbirds. I was much amused when he pointed out a pair of Rough-winged Swallows that were frolicking around above the dry dock that was just ahead of us. Johnny stoutly asserted his claim to them, and in a minute or two one had procured a straw and with much chatter and congratulation from its mate, flew with it right into the port hawse-pipe of the Hercules. This was something new to me. I had always seen the Rough-wings burrow in sand banks, though I had read of their nesting under bridges and in sheltered crannies. The old Greek sailor I found was protecting them well. He had the deck plug of the hawse-pipe neatly battened down and would not let any of the crew handle the hose forward but himself when they washed down decks. He was worried about their feed he told me. Said they wouldn't eat potatoes, or eggs or rice, and he was afraid they would go somewhere else if he didn't furnish them with the proper dainties. I explained the matter as well as I could to him, and every trip after we had little consultations and he gave me all the news about his pets and their smart doings. They seemed to occupy a very big place in his old heart. One day he called me in to back a letter to his mother, which I used to do for him every pay day be-

cause I could write her name in Greek, and he confided to me that he had told her about the little "Rough birds."

Three times a week the tug went up to Beaufort for groceries, etc., and the little birds seemed to think it was a pleasure trip for their special enjoyment. In town they tried to make friends with the Sparrows about the wharf, and came near having a pitched battle over some building material one day, but their watchful guardian scattered the contestants and brought away half a bucket full of rubbish for them to select from in peace.

Then there were eggs at last. When John tried to peep at them, the little hen "bit him" and he had the finger to show for it too. She was "scrabbich too much" he said. Trouble was nearby. A big derelict was drifting around somewhere about Cape Romain and several ships had narrowly missed disaster by it. The Hercules was ordered to put to sea, find it and blow it up. Away she went bright and early one morning, and was gone five days. When she came back a very dragged looking little Swallow was on the truck above the pennant. The other, Johnny had tucket away somewhere below. When the first big sea struck her down on the bar, Johnny had pulled out the plug and rescued the little mother, but her eggs and nest were past his aid. A day or two they mourned around, but soon set up housekeeping again in the same place. All went well and a young brood tried their wings from the rail of the Hercules but never came back. The same little pair, much more sober and sedate now and with much less chatter than in their younger days, at once began to renovate their old quarters. But the Hercules was ordered to Norfolk with all her crew. When she started off gayly that morning with much saluting of whistles and all her gay bunting flying, do you suppose those wise little birds went with her? No indeed. I became Johnny Greek's residuary legatee. For they came on board the Nantucket, made a careful survey and then took up their residence in one of the peep holes of the conning tower. When the Nantucket in turn was taken away, they were at some fashionable winter resort in the tropies. I look for them back this Spring. The Accomac has just as good hawse-pipes as those they liked so well on the Hercules.

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